The Countess Spencer.

THE

# CHIEF OBSTACLES

TO

# BENEVOLENCE

CONSIDERED, IN

A SERMON, PREACHED DECEMBER 12th, 1794,

AT THE

*CHARTERHOUSE CHAPEL, IN LONDON,*

TO CELEBRATE

*The Anniverſary of the Foundation of Sutton's Hoſpital,*

BY JOSEPH JEKYLL RYE, A.M.

RECTOR OF STOKE GOLDINGTON, BUCKS, VICAR OF DALLINGTON AND CHAPLAIN TO LORD CATHCART.

*LONDON,*

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1795.

TO

*SIR JOHN THROCKMORTON, BART.*

THE FOLLOWING DISCOURSE

IS DEDICATED,

WITH REGARD, ESTEEM AND AFFECTION,

*BY THE AUTHOR.*

JOHN xiii. 35.

*By this ſhall all men know that ye are my Diſciples if ye have love one to another.*

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THE duty of univerſal benevolence, recommended and enforced by our bleſſed Lord, is a doctrine ſo truly laudable, that it attracted the attention of the more illuſtrious Heathen, and generally excited their applauſe.

Lucian, who was the Governor of a large Roman Province, and the moſt ingenious and ſatirical author of his time, amid the cenſures he laviſhes on chriſtianity, dilates on this it's diſtinguiſhing principle, and as the ſole objection to ſo admirable a maxim, deems it inconſiſtent with worldly wiſdom; ſince crafty and deſigning men may employ it to prey upon their weaker brethren: for, ſays he, that they are brethren, that they ſhould deſpiſe wealth, and commu-

nicate it's bleſſings, is ordained by their legiſlator, to whoſe rules for life they ſcrupulouſly adhere.

Tho' we may flatter ourſelves that benevolence is a natural principle implanted in the heart of man, yet it is to the honour of the Chriſtian religion, that it is thereby enjoined as a duty, tho' liable to be interrupted by the paſſions when they acquire an aſcendancy over the heart. Brotherly love then, according to the heathen writer juſt quoted, characterized the primitive chriſtians. Their religion, as deſcribed by St. James and St. Luke, conſiſted " in viſiting the father-" leſs and widows in their affliction, and keeping themſelves " unſpotted from the world-—They eat their meat with " gladneſs and ſingleneſs of heart. Nor was there any " among them that lacked; for as many as were poſſeſſors " of lands or houſes ſold them; and brought the prices of " the things that were ſold, and laid them down at the " Apoſtles' feet, and diſtribution was made unto every " man, according as he had need." It is with pleaſure we advert to times in which the goſpel had ſuch commanding influence.

That pure and diſintereſted benevolence was occaſionally diſplayed by men, uninformed by the goſpel, we readily acknowledge;

acknowledge; but as a virtue deſerving general practice, it pleaſed the Inſtitutor of our Religion to make it a diſtinguiſhing feature in his eſtimable code of moral laws. Some modern philoſophers have boldly denied the exiſtence of this virtue, as an innate principle; but others, not leſs famed for intellectual powers, and unwilling to think ſo unfavourably of their ſpecies, have adduced inſtances of pure and diſintereſted benevolence, which ſufficiently confute the arguments of their opponents. In oppoſition to their theory, they refer them to the conduct of children, who frequently perform mutual acts of kindneſs, without fear of puniſhment or proſpect of reward. Every good man, they ſay, naturally wiſhes well to thoſe who have never injured him, feels compaſſion for objects of diſtreſs without recurring to his reaſoning faculties, and cannot be cold and indifferent to his fellow creatures: Nay, that even a robber takes not away the life of another, provided he can obtain the object of his wiſhes without the exertion of ſo dreadful an expedient. That great principle of ſocial union may indeed be ſuppreſſed or conſiderably impaired by the domination of paſſions, that are inſurmountable obſtacles to the practice of benevolence: Such as ambition, pride, revenge, and a love of pleaſure.

The man devoted to ambition, and merely anxious for power and authority, ſcruples not to commit the moſt flagrant acts of injuſtice; for to equity he pays no regard, when it interferes as a barrier to the attainment of his object. The pages of hiſtory are replete with the miſchief that this paſſion has occaſioned, from ſtateſmen, who have facrificed the good of their country upon the altar of intereſt; and from nations, who, ſtruggling for ſuperiority, have laid waſte whole provinces, and deluged kingdoms with blood. Till this deſtructive paſſion in man is properly reſtrained we muſt expect to ſee wars riſing upon wars in endleſs ſucceſſion.

Not more favourable to benevolence is pride, which, by it's pernicious influence, hardens the heart, and makes it torpid to the moſt generous feelings of philanthropy. It inſpires a contempt for thoſe, who occupy the lower ſituations in life, and are undiſtinguiſhed by the accidental circumſtances of wealth and power. The man of pride makes an improper eſtimate of thoſe who are employed in manual labours; he conſiders not how much he is dependent upon them, for the happineſs, the comforts and conveniences of life, which he muſt want if deſtitute of their aid and aſſiſtance; he thinks not of that future ſtate to which all are advancing,

advancing, and where pre-eminence of rank will be the recompence of ſuperior virtue, ſince the great judge is no reſpecter of perſons.

The voluptuary alſo fails in the practice of benevolence. The improper gratification of ſenſual appetite makes too great a demand upon his time and fortune, to admit of attention to plans formed to mitigate the ſufferings of the more unfortunate of his brethren. Examples of beneficence preſented to his view, attract not his regard. The wants and miſeries of human nature are drowned in the intoxicating bowl, and rarely draw him from the delirium of his irrational purſuits.

But of all the paſſions which counteract benevolence, revenge ſeems moſt inimical to this amiable virtue. The vindictive man, deaf to the voice of reaſon and the admonitions of conſcience, is never to be ſatisfied but by the infliction of ſome violent puniſhment upon his adverſary. Mis-uſing the paſſion of reſentment, implanted by our Creator for ſelf-defence, he extends it to the moſt undue limits. He does not puniſh for the ſake of amending the tranſgreſſor, nor to check him in his ſchemes of injuſtice, but

but ſolely from private pique, or the baſe impulſe of a malevolent mind.

Human nature was in ſo depraved a ſtate, when our Saviour entered the world, that it much needed ſuch ſalutary precepts as he ſupplied for the reſtoration of man to that purity and goodneſs, in which our firſt parents were created. By yielding a ſtrict obedience to his laws for our moral conduct, we ſhould conſiderably diminiſh the preſent corruption and ſhocking depravity of our nature. The adverſary to the chriſtian ſyſtem ſeems no ardent well-wiſher to his country, no advocate for the general benevolence, which is thereby inculcated, but rather the enemy to doctrines the moſt conſiſtent with reaſon, the moſt productive of the welfare of mankind, and which would carry conviction home to every candid and rational enquirer into the nature of their evidence. They are doctrines which breathe the moſt extenſive philanthropy, which diſcourage every ſelfiſh principle, every inordinate paſſion, the reſult of vicious appetite, and prejudicial to ſociety. But tho' they deter men from the violation of the ſocial compact, they do not urge them to flee to caves and deſerts, to wear out life in uſeleſs retirement and gloomy ſolitude; nor would they annul the neceſſary diſtinctions of rank and power, ariſing

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from the diverſity of abilities and talents, ſo evidently conſpicuous in human nature; but they rather enforce the duty of obedience to the magiſtrate, and all that are in authority, enjoining us to render honour to whom honour is due.

In the goſpel, no ſyſtem of government is propoſed as yielding perfect tranquillity and eaſe; for ſuch muſt be incompatible with the corrupted ſtate of the ſons of Adam. Nor are plans for the deſtruction of order and ſubordination in ſociety, recommended by the Prince of Peace.

But the ſpirit of benevolence, ſo earneſtly preſſed upon the diſciples of Chriſt, muſt be productive of the moſt beneficial conſequences to the community. Every man properly eſtimating his own importance in ſociety, will not undervalue his neighbour, tho' placed in a ſtation inferior to himſelf, if he faithfully diſcharges the poſt aſſigned him by Providence, conſcious that he is not exempted from contributing ſomething to the public welfare, he will think it criminal, that talents entruſted to him, for wiſe and uſeful purpoſes, ſhould remain unexerciſed. The conſideration that in a well-regulated ſociety, which to all its members communicates its bleſſings, all are by gratitude required to contribute their aid, ſhould operate with every one as an incentive

incentive to a vigourous and laudable exertion of his powers. As each individual of ſociety would be inſufficient, not only for the attainment of perfection, but even for the ſupply of his moſt urgent neceſſities, he muſt aſſociate with thoſe of his own ſpecies, from the junction and co-operation of whoſe various talents, he may procure the neceſſaries and conveniences of life. The faculties of man denote that he was formed for ſociety. Diſtinguiſhed by the powers of reaſon from the mere ſenſitive being, yet deſtitute of perfection, he finds God's ſeveral gifts unequally diſtributed among mankind, and thus there muſt be a mutual dependence running thro' all ranks. The head cannot ſay unto the feet, I have no need of you; nor again the feet to the head, I have no need of you. Nor can we without admiration contemplate the wiſdom and goodneſs of our Creator, in withholding from the individual, that variety of talents and abilities thus benevolently diſperſed. For could any man comprize within himſelf ſufficient qualities of mind and body, to feel entirely independent of his fellow creatures, he would ſoon prove indifferent, if not prejudicial to their intereſts. But the wiſe and virtuous man ſees and acknowledges the neceſſity of thoſe diſtinctions of reſpect and honour, exiſtent in all civilized countries; he ſees that there ſhould be different offices for the exertion of different talents,

lents, that while ſome are employing the great powers of intellect, in ſervice of the ſtate, the manual labour of others is requiſite towards the ſupport of thoſe engaged in the execution of deſigns for the public welfare.

Let us only take an impartial view of human nature, and we ſhall ſee the propriety of adhering to the precept contained in the text. We cannot but obſerve, that all men come into the world in the ſame manner, are compoſed of the ſame corporeal organs, are endowed with ſimilar faculties of reaſon and underſtanding, and that all muſt deſcend into the grave. All equally appear to be entitled to the enjoyments of liberty and life, who have not forfeited theſe bleſſings by any crime, and thoſe of our fellow creatures in diſtreſs have a ſtrong claim upon our compaſſion, and demand our ſympathy in their ſufferings. When we conſider that ſociety is ſo organized, that each individual may diſcharge his reſpective office, we find that our Creator never intended man to be a ſelfiſh and inactive creature, but that all his faculties of mind and body were uſeful to promote the happineſs and welfare of his ſpecies.

The hiſtory of that ſmall community of Chriſtians painted by St. Luke, is both pleaſing and inſtructive. In the midſt

of a licentious and luxurious age, they diſplayed the moſt extenſive and moſt exemplary benevolence. Their uniform inattention to ſelf, diſtinguiſhed them above the reſt of mankind; while they boldly ventured, at the hazard of their lives, to proclaim the conditions of the goſpel covenant. Not addicting themſelves to low and grovelling vices, but practiſing the great duties of ſocial virtue, juſtice and temperance, they were enabled the more efficaciouſly to communicate benefits to others, and have left an example moſt worthy of imitation. True pity ever influences to acts of humanity. Recommending mutual forbearance and forgiveneſs of injuries, it directs us to obſerve, with an eye of pity and candour, the weakneſſes and infirmities of our brethren; and that deeming all children of one father, in obedience to his laws, we manifeſt an univerſal benevolence. But thoſe muſt reſtrain their paſſions who would eſſentially benefit mankind. The domination of a ſingle vice o'erpowers the efforts of more generous virtues and occupies the man; whereas, from purer minds, we muſt expect the due, the frequent exerciſe of benevolence. It is from the energy of this ſublime virtue, that great and noble minds, have left ſuch monuments of beneficence behind them, as to command the eſteem and veneration of the moſt diſtant ages.

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This day's ſolemnity powerfully impreſſes upon our minds the remembrance of one, whoſe diſtinguiſhed philanthropy claims our gratitude. To his benevolence we owe this excellent inſtitution for the inſtruction of youth and the ſupport of age. Intellectual knowledge may properly be eſtimated by thoſe who have obſerved the miſerable effects of ignorance. The cultivation of the mind not only benefits the individual, but the community at large.

When we take a review of the times preceding the reformation, the minds of the people appear to have been enſlaved to ſuperſtition and bigotry; but ſince the more general diffuſion of knowledge, as they have been cultivated and enlarged, they have produced the fruits of a rational piety and juſt notions of the dignity of the human character. States, wherein learning has made no progreſs, preſent a melancholy picture of profligate manners, and a wretched people, influenced by lawleſs paſſion, and erring in moral duties from the defects in their mental powers.

In times preceding our Saviour's Advent, the ſyſtem of ethics was confined to a few men, denominated philoſophers, whereof ſome of the moſt eminent, preſuming on their ſuperior talents to debaſe their fellow creatures, arro-

gantly argued, "That men of great bodily ſtrength, but "weak in intellectual powers, are deſtined by nature to "ſerve, as were thoſe of better capacity to command; that "the Greeks and ſome of the adjoining nations, eminent "for productions of genius, have a natural right to empire "over the reſt of mankind, who appear to have been "merely intended for ſlavery and toil." Such diſgraceful ſentiments are juſtly diſcarded by the ſenſible man, who eaſily diſcerns the fallacy of ſuch flimſy reaſoning.

Whilſt, in our ſchools, the fine writings of the ſages of antiquity are peruſed, and much advantage derived from them, the ſcholar is not enjoined to admit all their aſſertions. Their dogmas are diſtinctly canvaſſed, and among their numerous excellencies, revelation has exhibited their defects. The ore is ſeparated from the droſs. Their notions of benevolence diſplayed before applauding diſciples were oftentimes erroneous. Though they launched forth in praiſe of patriotiſm, they without ſcruple failed in tenderneſs and humanity to foreigners, and the captives in war were treated with every indignity that the conqueror could inflict upon the unfortunate being, whoſe only crime conſiſted in fighting for his country.

The exercise of benevolence, towards the whole human race, formed no part of their morality. Their motives for doing good were mercenary, and their great teacher did not give them the true basis upon which their actions were to be founded. But where reason and revelation go hand in hand, as in this illustrious seminary of learning, man's moral nature must be much improved, and a more pure philosophy than is to be met with in the Lyceum and Portico, must be the fruits of such valuable institutions, as this we now commemorate to form succeeding generations. Our youth, at the same time, are instructed to keep their passions and appetites in due subordination, and qualified to improve their intellectual powers, ever exhorted not to neglect the duties of the heart, but to watch over that treasure with all diligence. Nothing seems to contribute more to the promotion of virtue than public schools. It has, however, been debated, whether a private is not preferable to a public education; but though the question may not soon be decided, we naturally feel a partiality for this place, so productive of examples eminent for piety and virtue. We cannot help preferring the mode whereby we were educated, till we have satisfactory proofs, that these large seminaries of learning are palpably detrimental to the religion and morals of the pupils. We rather conclude, that

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in theſe ſeats of learning, where the incentives to virtue are ſo numerous, and the diſcouragements to vice ſo great, we need not be in the leaſt apprehenſive for the ſafety of our youth.

It is true that paradoxes are ſometimes to be met with, in ſome of the writings of the ancients, but a judicious maſter always points out the ſophiſms of the different ſects of philoſophers, and lets no opinion paſs unnoticed, however ſanctioned by the authority of a great name, if repugnant to any precept of the goſpel. And it is but ſtrict juſtice to the ancients themſelves to acknowledge, that few actions are commended by them, which are not meritorious and worthy of imitation. The poets and hiſtorians of Greece and Rome may be ſtudied with advantage as well as pleaſure. It is univerſally allowed, that emulation, exertion, and mutual intercourſe, are beneficial to nations, which would otherwiſe continue in their primitive ſtate of barbariſm, were not the powers of induſtry called forth in the reciprocal exchange of their various ſuperfluities and goods.

In ſtates debarred by ſituation from frequent intercourſe with foreigners, civilization and refinement have been ſlower in

in their progreſs, than in thoſe that laboured not under the local diſadvantages of mountains, woods and lakes, apparently impaſſable. In like manner individuals reap advantages from the obſervation of various manners, talents and abilities, diſplayed in a public ſchool, that ſeem denied to a ſolitary education, where there are no competitors for literary honours, no incitements to activity and emulation, in the purſuit of knowledge; and where the powers of the mind muſt often lie dormant, for want of ſomething ſufficiently ſtimulative to prompt them to a laudable exertion.

As the courſe of ſtudy in this place is directed to the improvement of the heart, and none but men of correct morals and real literary knowledge, can be the inſtructors of the junior members of this ſociety, it may be reaſonably argued therefrom, that the preference can not be given to a private, before a public education.

But our Founder's benevolence is not confined to the youth; he is not contented with having manifeſted his ſolicitude, for thoſe juſt entering upon a buſtling world, where each is influenced by ſelf-intereſt, and heedleſs of every thing not immediately conducing to his own emolument, but

but he extends his regard and affection to thoſe in a more advanced period, who, from age and infirmity, are no longer able to procure the neceſſary comforts and conveniences which mitigate the afflictions of declining life. Such an aſylum may conſole man for the misfortunes and calamities experienced in earlier days. Here he need take no thought for to-morrow, nor feel any ſolicitude for future ſubſiſtence. By the munificence of our Founder, eaſe and competency are held out to our aged brethren; that while relieved from thoſe troubles and ſorrows incident to age and poverty, they may gradually prepare themſelves for a future ſtate.

Moſt men of reflexion reſolve to devote the concluſion of life to God and the concerns of another world, well aware that ſome preparation is neceſſary to become inhabitants of heaven; but from too great influence of worldly things, and from an indolence which leads them to procraſtinate the ſeaſon when they ſhould "put their houſe in order," they rarely find leiſure to qualify themſelves for the manſions of glory.

But in theſe walls the mind finds ample ſcope for the exerciſes

exerciſes of prayer and contemplation. The regular and ſtated periods of public worſhip naturally call man's thoughts from earth to heaven. The din of war annoys not the happy members of this community, nor are they apprehenſive of being driven from their peaceful habitations, like thoſe members of religious and charitable ſocieties on the Continent, who have experienced all the direful effects of a miſguided mob, which, always cruel, and driven on by the impulſe of the moment, pays little attention to the voice of reaſon and juſtice.

From our inſular ſituation, we are not expoſed to the danger of having our provinces deſolated by armies, nor our religious and eleemoſynary eſtabliſhments delivered up to the pillage of ſacrilege and rapine. But here, ſecure from ravages and lawleſs violence, the brethren of this community may unmoleſted contemplate every part of the life of Chriſt, and endeavour to imitate his amiable character pourtrayed in the writings of his diſciples.

With a juſt ſenſe of gratitude to the Almighty, for innumerable bleſſings beſtowed upon this favoured iſle, let us exert ourſelves to anſwer the deſign of the benevolent Founder of this Hoſpital, by practiſing every religious

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and moral duty, ſo that we may be found uſeful members of ſociety, and finally let us pray for the proſperity of this our Jeruſalem, that peace may be in her walls and plenteouſneſs within her palaces.

*Note—The Members of Sutton's Hoſpital conſiſt of eighty old Gentlemen, who thro' misfortunes have been reduced to poverty; and alſo of forty Boys, to be educated in claſſical learning.*

*Publiſhed by the ſame Author,*

A SERMON, preached for the Benefit of the Northampton Infirmary.

A DISCOURSE, on Perſonal Remembrance in a Future State, dedicated to the Counteſs Spencer. 2d edit.